

Greeks Have Eye on Pet Foods

By Joanna Apergis

Until recently, pet dogs and cats in Greece lived outside the home and were fed mostly table scraps. The traditional Greek perception was that pets were part of the landscape, and it was unnecessary and unsanitary to allow them to stay indoors. Now the way Greeks care for their pets is changing.

A Change in Perception

A combination of influences from both the United States and other Western European countries through television, film and magazines has begun to transform the way many Greeks think of cats and dogs. Households of all types, in both the suburbs and urban areas, have begun to include pets inside the home. Some Greeks, particularly those with high incomes, see pets as a status symbol.

New Kind of Pet Owner

This new kind of pet owner is more likely to be a well-informed customer of supermarkets, pet food stores and veterinary clinics, where pet products are widely available. They read labels on pet food packaging and often obtain advice from veterinarians and pet store employees. Pet owners with higher incomes are more likely to purchase premium pet food brands from pet stores and veterinary clinics, including those produced in the United States. Greeks hold U.S. pet food products in high regard.

Retail Outlets

Supermarkets are by far the largest

retailers of pet foods, with more than 85 percent of the sales in Greece. They stock mainly private-label premium products imported from other EU (European Union) countries.

A secondary but important retail outlet for pet foods is the pet supply store, with more innovative, higher quality and greater variety of products. In 2003, \$1.57 million worth of U.S. pet foods were imported into Greece, and were sold mainly in pet supply stores and veterinary clinics concentrated in and around Athens and other densely populated cities.

GREEKS WITH HIGH INCOMES SEE PETS AS A STATUS SYMBOL.

During the last three years, Greece has seen growth in the number of pet supply stores of 5-10 percent, and these stores offer the best prospect for future sales of U.S. pet food products. Many customers of pet supply stores and veterinary clinics are willing to pay slightly higher prices for premium pet foods. These customers are also interested in pet treats that have health benefits such as dental cleaning and bone health. As a result, the upper premium pet food market offers the best prospects for U.S. exporters.

Future sales of pet foods in Greece are expected to increase by at least 5 percent annually for the next five years. Retail shelf space is at a premium and competition with less expensive European brands is strong.

Entering the Market

Using a local Greek distributor to introduce a new product is generally the

best entry method. Local distributors are the best route for achieving wide distribution through many channels, including the crucial pet supply stores and veterinary clinics. A visit to Greece to meet a potential partner or customer is essential. Personal contact is often the critical factor in landing a sale or a contract.

Since prices of U.S. pet foods are usually higher than those of competing brands, marketing and advertising are crucial to success. The best approach for a U.S. supplier to introduce a product is through advertising and free samples. For example, a veterinary clinic display would convey to clients the endorsement of the veterinarian. Sending samples to veterinarians is a useful technique to getting products into the market. ■

The author is an agricultural marketing specialist intern. For more information on selling pet foods in Greece, contact:

FAS Office of Agricultural Affairs, U.S. Embassy, Rome, Italy. Tel.: (011-39-06) 4674-2362; Fax: (011-39-06) 4788-7008; E-mail: agrome@usda.gov

FAS Office of Agricultural Affairs, U.S. Embassy, Athens, Greece: Tel.: (011-30-210) 643-1289; Fax: (011-30-210) 721-5264; E-mail: fasgr@ath.forthnet.gr

For details, see FAS Report GR4015. To find it on the Web, start at www.fas.usda.gov, select **Attaché Reports** and follow the prompts.

As a member of the EU, Greece operates under all EU tariff and health certification requirements. EU import certification requirements may be found on the EU Commission Web site: <http://europa.eu.int>

